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# City, Garden, Wilderness: Insiders and Outsiders in Dante's *Commedia*\*

Claire Honess

*Royal Holloway, University of London*

## Introduction

The notion of the city is so central to Dante's writing that it has become almost a commonplace to describe him as an 'essentially civic' poet and thinker.<sup>1</sup> Above all, Dante is regarded as the poet of Florence, the city-state 'into which he was born and which provided not only what would be called nowadays his "background", but also the stage on which he actively took part [...] in the turmoil and ever-shifting fortunes of medieval politics' (D'Entrèves, pp.8-9). However, although Dante's political thought has been widely studied, the importance of questions of 'the city' and of 'citizenship' in a general sense has often been eclipsed by the broader and perhaps more controversial issues of Church and Empire, or by a narrow consideration of particular cities - most notably Florence and Rome.<sup>2</sup> In my own work on the concept of the city in Dante's writing - and in what follows - I do not concern myself primarily with the poet's attitude towards individual cities, nor with his specifically political views on the function and organisation of the city (whilst acknowledging the undoubted importance of both these elements), but concentrate above all on issues such as notions of citizenship and the way in which the city functions as an image in Dante's writing.

## City and Exile

In Book IV of the *Convivio*, Dante states, following Aristotle, that human beings are by nature political animals, since individuals alone can never hope to achieve the 'happy life' towards which they

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naturally incline, except with the help of their fellow human beings within the community.<sup>3</sup> To this end, therefore, they tend to join together in certain set groupings - family, neighbourhood, city, kingdom, and finally Empire.<sup>4</sup> Of these, the smallest grouping able to function as a self-sufficient political entity in its own right is the city, whose *raison d'être*, as Dante reiterates in the *Monarchia* is to enable its citizens to live well and to fulfil their needs - 'bene sufficienterque vivere', (*Mon.* I, v, 7).

Moreover, in the *Commedia* too the importance, or rather the *necessity*, of the city to human life on earth is emphasised. In the Heaven of Venus, the soul of Charles Martel asks the Pilgrim, 'sarebbe il peggio / per l'omo in terra, se non fosse cive?' ['would it be worse / for man on earth were there no social order?' - literally, 'were he not a citizen?'] to which the Pilgrim replies, without the slightest hesitation, 'Sì [...] e qui ragion non cheggio' ['Of course [...] and here I seek no proof'] (*Par.* VIII, 115-117). Human beings would be worse off, that is, if they did not belong to a city. As in the *Convivio*, here too the need for citizens to work together for the common good is seen as being at the basis of the city's role in human society. Like Aristotle (referred to explicitly in line 120), in his famous comparison of the citizens of the *polis* to the sailors of a ship,<sup>5</sup> Charles Martel goes on to express the need for diversity in human relations:

«E puot'elli esser, se giú non si vive  
diversamente per diversi offici?  
Non, se 'l maestro vostro ben vi scrive  
Sì venne deducendo infino a quinci;  
poscia conchiuse: «Dunque esser diverse  
convien di vostri effetti le radici: [...]»

[“And can this be, unless men had on earth  
different natures, serving different ends?  
Not so, if what your master writes is true.”  
By reasoning step by step he reached this point  
and then concluded: “So, the very roots  
of man's activities must be diverse: [...]”]  
(*Par.* VIII, 118-123)

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The city thus seems to be defined as a political structure within which human beings cooperate, carrying out the different functions to which they are best suited, in order to guarantee the happiness of the whole community.

In addition to these theoretical statements, the importance for Dante himself of belonging to a city is clearly reflected in the poet's own life - both in his active involvement in Florentine politics before his exile from the city in 1302, and in his continued (if disillusioned) description of himself as a citizen of Florence after that traumatic event, referring to himself in his letters as 'Florentinus et exul inmeritus' ['a Florentine and an undeserving exile']. Even in those of his works written after his exile, he continued to reiterate his love for his 'patria'. He claimed - for example - in the *De vulgari eloquentia* that 'amenior locus quam Florentia non existat' ['a more delightful place than Florence does not exist'] (*D.V.E.* I, vi, 3), and, in the famous opening of *Paradiso* XXV, he clearly stated his desire to return to the city:

Se mai continga che 'l poema sacro  
al quale ha posto mano e cielo e terra,  
sì che m'ha fatto per molti anni macro,  
vinca la crudeltà che fuor mi serra  
del bello ovile ov'io dormi' agnello,  
nimico ai lupi che li danno guerra;  
con altra voce omai, con altro vello  
ritornerò poeta, e in sul fonte  
del mio battesimo prenderò 'l capello;

[If ever it happen that this sacred poem  
to which both Heaven and Earth have set their hand,  
and made me lean from laboring so long,  
wins over those cruel hearts that exile me  
from my sweet fold where I grew up a lamb,  
foe to the wolves that war upon it now,  
with a changed voice and with another fleece,  
I shall return, a poet, and at my own  
baptismal font assume laurel wreath,]  
(*Par.* XXV, 1-9)

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Indeed, it is in the *Commedia*'s repeated references to Dante's exile from Florence that the poet's conception of the fundamental conflict between 'inside' and 'outside' is most prominent. In *Paradiso* XVII the meaning of the various - more or less veiled - prophecies that have been made concerning Dante's future during the course of his journey are finally explained in an unequivocal way by his ancestor, Cacciaguida, who tells him bluntly that 'di Fiorenza partir ti conviene' ['you [...] shall have to leave your Florence'] (*Par.* XVII, 48). Here exile is presented as a traumatic leaving behind of all that is most dear to the poet:

Tu lascerai ogne cosa diletta  
più caramente; e questo è quello strale  
che l'arco de lo essilio pria saetta.  
Tu proverai sì come sa di sale  
lo pane altrui, e come è duro calle  
lo scendere e 'l salir per l'altrui scale.

[You shall be forced to leave behind those things  
you love most dearly, and this is the first  
arrow the bow of your exile will shoot.  
And you will know how salty is the taste  
of others' bread, how hard the road that takes  
you down and up the stairs of others' homes.]  
(*Par.* XVII, 55-60)

and the sense of the poet's isolation is intensified by the fact that Cacciaguida goes on to tell him that he will soon break away from the 'compagnia malvagia e scempia' ['despicable, senseless company'] (*Par.* XVII, 62) of his fellow-exiles, forming a 'parte per [se] stesso' -a party or a faction of one. This is obviously a commentary upon the factional conflicts which Dante saw as tearing Florence apart;<sup>6</sup> yet it also paints a picture of the poet's situation very much in keeping with the description of himself in exile given in the *Convivio*, where he claims that, 'per le parti quasi tutte a le quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato [...] ['I have wandered like a pilgrim, almost like a beggar, through virtually all the regions to which this tongue of ours extends'], and that 'Veramente io sono stato legno senza vela e senza governo, portato a diversi porti e foci e liti dal vento secco che vapora la

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dolorosa povertade' ['Truly I have been a ship without sail or rudder, brought to different ports, inlets and shores by the dry wind that painful poverty blows'] (*Conv.* I, iii, 4-5). This portrait, exaggerated as it may be, nonetheless conveys the psychological anguish which Dante suffered as a result of his exclusion from his city. It also points to the opposing sets of values attached to the notions of 'inside' and 'outside' which -as will be seen - emerge from the *Commedia* as a whole.

The opposition portrayed, in Dante's discussions of his exile, between the city - seen as the ideal human environment - and that which is outside it - an inhospitable environment in which the individual's fundamental human need for community is denied - holds true even in the context of those passages where Dante (either in his own voice or through one or other of his characters) berates Florence for its corruption and its citizens for their sinfulness, since the city always has *potentially* a positive value for Dante - as the exchange with Charles Martel bears witness - even when, in reality, this positive potential is not fulfilled. The comparison of the ideal Florence of Cacciaguida's time with the corrupt city known by Dante in *Paradiso* XV and XVI illustrates this point. Cacciaguida's Florence - the perfect earthly city, epitomising peace and virtue - was still contained, we are told, within its first circle of walls (traditionally supposed to have been constructed at the time of Charlemagne), to which a second circle was added in 1173, and a third begun in 1284:

Fiorenza dentro da la cerchia antica,  
ond'ella toglie ancora e terza e nona,  
si stava in pace, sobria e pudica.

[Florence, enclosed within her ancient walls  
from which she still hears terce and nones ring out,  
once lived in peace, a pure and temperate town:]  
(*Par.* XV, 97-99)

In contrast, Dante's city is seen as having been corrupted by its acceptance of citizens who should, by rights, have remained outside:

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Oh quanto fora meglio esser vicine  
quelle genti ch'io dico, e al Galluzzo  
e a Trespiano aver vostro confine,  
che averle dentro e sostener lo puzzo  
del villan d'Aguglion, di quel da Signa,  
che già per barattare ha l'occhio aguzzo!

[Oh how much better it would be if they  
were still your neighbors and your boundaries  
Galluzzo and Trespiano as they were,  
than have such folk within and bear the stench  
of Aguglione's churl and him from Signa,  
already with a sharp eye out for swindling!]  
(*Par.* XVI, 52-57)

### Inside and Outside

It is clear, therefore, that for Dante the notion of 'inside' (with its associations of belonging, of acceptance and of community) has fundamentally positive connotations, whilst that of 'outside' (banishment, vulnerability, rejection) carries negative ones. Gaston Bachelard has commented that this opposition between inside and outside 'has the sharpness of the dialectics of *yes* and *no*', or even of 'being and non-being',<sup>7</sup> and this may be seen to be the case not only for Dante, but also for the Middle Ages in general.<sup>8</sup> In addition to the extensive use of exile as a political weapon in factional disputes,<sup>9</sup> exclusion was also a 'punishment' imposed upon many other elements which medieval society felt existed 'outside' its accepted set of values. Many different minority groups in medieval societies - heretics, Jews, lepers, homosexuals and prostitutes - habitually suffered exclusion from the community and the denial of civil rights, as well as the confiscation of property which this entailed. For such groups, excluded because of their beliefs, their race, their sexual orientation or even the disease from which they suffered, 'existence itself becomes a breaking of boundaries' and the status of 'outsider' becomes an inevitable one.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, one of the most common features ascribed to these groups of outsiders was that they were 'wandering and rootless, confined by no boundaries, subject to no restraint of custom or kin, without a settled place in society'.<sup>11</sup> Their natural environment is therefore identified with a space which Paul

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Zumthor has defined as the *non-lieu* - the 'non-place' or 'anti-place' - a place totally cut off from human society.<sup>12</sup> Exclusion from the city implied that the individual had in some way - consciously or unconsciously - rejected that part of human nature which made him or her a political animal, it implied literally 'non-being', since in living outside the city this fundamental human attribute was being negated. This notion is seen also in Aristotle, who considered barbarians as natural slaves precisely because they did not organise themselves into cities; and for whom only those who are 'political animals' can be said to be fully realised as human beings.<sup>13</sup> The outsider, therefore, necessarily evokes negative sentiments since he or she is not fully human.

Linked with the use of exile or exclusion - the *imposition* of the status of outsider - as a form of punishment in the Middle Ages, was the deep-seated fear of the city-dwellers themselves. Beyond the city itself and the relatively small cultivated area of the *contado*, the countryside and - worse still - the wilder areas of marsh and forest were conceived as a threat to the urban pockets of 'civilisation', since they were seen as representing 'the natural negation of social life'.<sup>14</sup> What is more, the contrast between city and countryside in this period was a very sharp one, since only a very small proportion of land had been cultivated, the rest being semi-wild and unsuitable for agricultural development.<sup>15</sup> In Italy, during the course of the thirteenth century, attempts were made to 'sanitise' the inside of the cities and the area immediately outside the walls, as if to enhance the distinction between civilisation and wilderness. Roads radiating out of the towns into the countryside were ordered to be gravelled and maintained, the agricultural land which in previous centuries had been located both inside and outside the city walls was now reduced to make way for buildings, streets and squares, and the keeping of animals within the walls was banned, whilst some statutes even ordered trees in the towns to be chopped down. Above all, there was a concern that the outward appearance of the city should reflect the ideal of 'civilisation' which it represented.<sup>16</sup> In keeping with this ideal, cemeteries were located outside the walls, the space also used for executions, and where prostitution - illegal within the city itself - was seen as



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acceptable. Moreover, with the growing self-consciousness of the town as a distinct entity markedly different from the country, wild areas - and particularly forests - came to be regarded as strange and frightening places, linked with the supernatural and the monstrous. The city, on the other hand, was seen as a 'protected' space; and civic patriotism was largely centred around those aspects of the city which defined it as such and which served to protect it - physically or psychologically - from that which lay outside. In this respect the city's walls were obviously emblematic, since they provided a solid and reassuring demarcation line between inside and outside.<sup>17</sup> However, other features of medieval Italian city-states also served to underline this opposition. Churches dedicated to the city's patron saints were often situated close to the walls, whilst their relics were sometimes preserved within the walls themselves, creating a second, spiritual, line of defence; the *carroccio*, 'a focus of civic patriotism on all ceremonial occasions',<sup>18</sup> was used to carry the city's standard in battles against neighbouring cities; civic religious festivals frequently included 'profane' elements, 'used to denigrate and ridicule those outside the city or its social body, such as enemy factions or rival cities',<sup>19</sup> and these same festivals were also used to reassert the city's authority over its *contado*, through the participation of representatives of subject territories with offerings (usually of wax candles or cloth *pallii*) for the cathedral.<sup>20</sup> In her discussion of the image of the city in medieval art, Chiara Frugoni sums up this contrast between the civilisation within and the wilderness without:

The interior of the city is also the place for the churches, and for humankind, which belongs to God, with the walls denoting the separation from the surrounding space - a space that is natural, unmarked by human action, hence inhabited by demons and evil.<sup>21</sup>

Thus in a depiction of the dance of Salome,<sup>22</sup> the beheading of John the Baptist and the handing over of the head to Herodias, John is the only figure to be portrayed *within* the city. In contrast, two trees are situated next to Salome and Herodias to show that the 'guilty' figures are situated within a natural, rather than an urban, space. Similarly, in a Trecento polyptych portraying Christ at prayer in the Garden of

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Gethsemane, a portion of walls and a gate mark off the space inhabited by Christ and his sleeping disciples.<sup>23</sup>

### Eternal Exile

The fear and suspicion of the city-dweller when faced with a hostile natural environment is evoked nowhere more clearly than in the opening canto of the *Commedia*, where Dante's pilgrim finds himself alone and lost in a dark and pathless forest, threatened by wild beasts, and with no idea how to return to the civilisation which he has lost. It is well-known that *this* forest is a symbolic and literary construct which represents sin and the pilgrim's realisation of the danger of sin, and from which escape is possible only through the intervention of the 'tre donne benedette' (*Inf.* II, 124) - the Virgin Mary, St Lucy and Beatrice - and via the journey through Hell, Purgatory and Heaven. Yet the situation described in the poem's opening lines is one which, on the literal level, evokes fundamental human fears.<sup>24</sup> Bachelard describes very clearly the danger implicit in the 'immensity' of the forest:

We do not have to be long in the woods to experience the always rather anxious impression of 'going deeper and deeper' into a limitless world. Soon, if we do not know where we are going, we no longer know where we are.<sup>25</sup>

The presence of wild animals - traditionally seen, in the Middle Ages, as symbolic of evil forces - in Dante's 'selva oscura' merely serves to confirm this negative impression.

The dark wood *is*, however, significant to my theme in another, more symbolic, way. The 'selva oscura', interpreted as a place of sin, is also a place of exile; and the pilgrim who comes to his senses in this wood is an outsider in the sense that he is in a place which cuts him off here from the possibility of salvation.<sup>26</sup> The 'exile' of the pilgrim in the dark wood is the exile of all those who sin, an exile which has its root in the banishment of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. Adam himself, in his encounter with the pilgrim in *Paradiso* XXVI, describes his punishment in these terms:

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Or, figliuol mio, non il gustar del legno  
fu per sé la cagion ti tanto essilio,  
ma solamente il trapassar del segno.

[Know now, my son, the tasting of the tree  
was not itself the cause of such long exile,  
but only the transgression of God's bounds.]  
(*Par.* XXVI, 115-117)

and in the biblical account of the Fall, God's words to Adam reveal that banishment from the idyllic Garden implies also a new life within an inhospitable and harsh environment:<sup>27</sup>

[...] maledicta terra in opere tuo: in laboribus comedes  
ex ea cunctis diebus vitae tuae. Spinas et tribulos  
germinabit tibi, et comedes herbam terrae. In sudore  
vultus tui vsceris pane, donec revertaris in terram de  
qua sumptus es: quia pulvis es et in pulverem  
reverteris.

[Accursed be the soil because of you. With suffering  
shall you get your food from it every day of your life.  
It shall yield you brambles and thistles, and you shall  
eat wild plants. With sweat on your brow shall you eat  
your bread, until you return to the soil as you were  
taken from it. For dust you are and to dust you shall  
return.]  
(Genesis III, 17-18)

That Dante conceives of his journey to God as a symbolic return from exile is clear in many passages of the *Commedia*. In the encounter with Brunetto Latini - significantly an episode in which the theme of exile, both political and spiritual, is to the fore - the pilgrim describes Virgil as leading him 'home' - 'a ca' (*Inf.* XV, 54) - through Hell. The 'home' referred to here is obviously the pilgrim's spiritual home, the home which he had lost on wandering into the dark wood and to which, in that same opening canto, Virgil had promised to restore him. Brunetto, who here prophesies Dante's exile from Florence, is himself an exile from this heavenly home, and the pilgrim's description of him as 'de l'umana natura posto in bando' ['banished from our life on earth' - literally, 'from human

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nature'], although it ostensibly refers merely to death as a banishment from life on earth, may also be applied both to Brunetto's particular sin - a sin, precisely, against Nature - and to the sinner's spiritual exile in Hell from the eternal life of Heaven. Moreover, for those souls destined ultimately to be saved, life on earth too comes to be seen as a painful exile from the 'City of God' in Heaven. This view is first expressed in the *Commedia* by the character of Sapia in *Purgatorio* XIII, who takes up the terminology of St Augustine's *De civitatis Dei*, according to which human beings' true home is in Heaven, in the *civitas Dei* - symbolised by Jerusalem. From this point of view, earthly life, life in the *civitas terrena* - symbolised by Babylon or Egypt - implies, at best, a temporary pilgrimage at the end of which the soul may be admitted to God's city, and, at worst, a permanent exile from God first on earth and then in Hell.<sup>28</sup> In answer to the pilgrim's question as to whether any of the souls being punished in the *girone* of envy are Italians, Sapia answers:

O frate mio, ciascuna è cittadina  
d'una vera città; ma tu vuoi dire  
che vivesse in Italia peregrina.

[My brother, all of us are citizens  
of one true city. You mean is there a soul  
who was a pilgrim once in Italy?]  
(*Purg.* XIII, 94-96)

Similarly in *Paradiso* XXV, as if in response to the canto's opening lines expressing Dante's desire to return to Florence, Beatrice describes the pilgrim's journey through Hell and Purgatory to Heaven in Augustinian terms as a parallel of the Exodus story, when she explains that it is because of Dante's virtue of hope that:

[...] li è conceduto che d'Egitto  
vegna in Ierusalemme per vedere,  
anzi che 'l militar li sia prescritto.

[...] he is allowed to come  
from Egypt to behold Jerusalem  
before his fighting days on earth are done.]  
(*Par.* XXV, 55-57)

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Here, as in the encounter with Brunetto Latini, an ironic contrast is drawn between two different types of exile. On the one hand, Dante expresses the desire that, through the mediation of his 'poema sacro', he may be able to return to his native city. On the other, however, it is clear that the journey which the poem describes represents a return from exile in a more significant, universal sense, and that the function of Dante's poem - as Cacciaguida has made clear in *Paradiso* XVII ('vital nodrimento / lascerà poi, quando sarà digesta' ['once well-digested / they will become a vital nutriment'] - *Par.* XVII, 131-132) - relates to this latter theme, in the sense that it offers to its readers an example of how to avoid the eternal exile of Hell and, instead, be accepted into the city of God in Heaven.<sup>29</sup> In *Paradiso* XXIII, Heaven is presented once again as the *civitas Dei* from which earthly life, where sin is a constant presence, is a 'Babylonian exile':

Quivi si vive e gode del tesoro  
che s'acquistò piangendo ne lo essilio  
di Babilon [...]

[Here they truly live and they enjoy  
the wealth their tears had won for them while they  
in Babylonian exile scorned all gold.]  
(*Par.* XXIII, 133-135)

As Mazzotta comments, 'the thrust of the passage is the typological opposition, made familiar by St Augustine's *City of God*, between the idolatry of gold at Babylon and the spiritual treasure of the heavenly Jerusalem'. However, 'the opposition between Babylon and the heavenly Jerusalem cannot be taken as absolute, for as the joy of paradise comes forth as a recompense for the anguish suffered at Babylon, Dante casts exile as an ascetic and redemptive experience'.<sup>30</sup> Dante's experience of exile in the Dark Wood is an essential precondition for his experience of Heaven, just as proper participation in life on earth, inevitably seen in negative terms for pilgrims aiming towards the *civitas Dei*, is a necessary condition for entry into that heavenly city.<sup>31</sup> Finally, in the Empyrean, Florence itself comes to be seen as a kind of 'Babylon', a *civitas terrena* which stands in opposition to the divine, eternal city of Heaven. Dante refers to himself,

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[...] che al divino da l'umano,  
a l'eterno dal tempo era venuto,  
e di Fiorenza in popol giusto e sano

[[...] coming to Heaven from mortal earth,  
from man's time to Divine eternity,  
from Florence to a people just and sane]  
(*Par.* XXXI, 37-39)

and here the pilgrim's own sense of being an outsider - a living man allowed to witness the glories of heaven - is illustrated by the poet in an image which compares him to another of the traditional medieval figures of the outsider - the barbarian:

Se i barbari, venendo da tal plaga  
che ciascun giorno d'Elice si cuopra,  
rotante col suo figlio ond'ella è vaga,  
veggendo Roma e l'ardua sua opra,  
stupefaciensi, quando Laterano  
a le cose mortali andò di sopra;  
io [...]  
di che stupor dovea esser compiuto!

[If the barbarians (coming from such parts  
as every day are spanned by Helice,  
travelling the sky with her beloved son)  
when they saw Rome, her mighty monuments  
(the days the Latcran, built high, outsoared  
all mortal art), were so struck with amazement,  
then I [...]  
with what amazement must I have been struck!]  
(*Par.* XXXI, 31-40)

### The City of Dis

The opposition evoked here between Rome, the supreme city for Dante - the only city worthy of standing as an image of Heaven - and the barbarian - the archetypal outsider - returns us neatly to the notion of uncivilised space. Such space is epitomised in Dante's 'selva oscura' but also traditionally in the wilderness and the desert - the dwelling-place of the barbarian, the wild man or woman and the monster, and the place which symbolically represents the state of being cut off from the possibility of salvation. Given the associations

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which I have enumerated so far of inside with civilised space, happiness in this life and salvation in the next; and of outside with uncivilised space, suffering, sin and damnation, it might seem surprising that no sooner does Dante's pilgrim agree to undertake the journey which, as Virgil explains, offers the only possibility of escape from the dark wood, than he should be presented as being taken into a city. 'PER ME SI VA NE LA CITTÀ DOLENTE' ['I AM THE WAY INTO THE DOLEFUL CITY'] (*Inf.* III, 1) proclaims the inscription over the gate of Hell, through which Virgil leads the pilgrim '*dentro a le segrete cose*' ['*in, into those mysteries*'] (*Inf.* III, 21 - my italics).

It is clear that, on one level at least, Dante intends his Hell to be understood as a civic entity. Indeed, the poet seems concerned to make the urban aspects of his Hell as realistic as possible. Thus, the gate of Hell, with its chilling words, is modelled on the gates of many medieval cities, which also often bore inscriptions, although these normally praised the city to which they offered access, in contrast to Dante's gate with its dire warning ('LASCIASTE OGNI SPERANZA VOI CH'INTRATE' ['ABANDON EVERY HOPE, ALL YOU WHO ENTER'] - *Inf.* III, 9).<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the approach to the city of Dis in cantos VIII and IX of *Inferno* is also presented in realistic terms. This is evident from the first mention of the approaching city, when the pilgrim catches sight of a high tower - an '*alta torre*' (*Inf.* VIII, 2). That a tower should be the first feature of the city to catch the eye of the pilgrim is wholly naturalistic. The cities of Dante's day abounded in such buildings, designed to provide both a safe haven and a military vantage point for noble families in times of civic discord. Thus it is appropriate that the tower, first mentioned at the end of canto VII ('venimmo al piè d'una torre al da sezzo' ['We came, in time, to the foot of a high tower'] - *Inf.* VII, 130), should point from afar to the city, which itself is first explicitly introduced in canto VIII, when Virgil warns that 'Omai [...] / s'appressa la città c'ha nome Dite' [And now [...] / coming closer is the city we call Dis'] (*Inf.* VIII, 67-68). Moreover, we learn that, like any city, the city of Dis is inhabited by 'gravi cittadini' ['fierce citizens'] (*Inf.* VIII, 69), and has an army, a '*grande stuolo*' (*Inf.*

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VIII, 69). The travellers soon encounter members of this, forming the guard over the gate of the city. Indeed the whole defensive exterior of the city of Dis, with its moat - 'l' alte fosse / che vullan quella terra sconsolata' ['those deep moats / that circled all of this unhappy city'] (*Inf.* VIII, 76-77), its walls, which 'parcan che ferro fosse' ['it seemed to me, were made of iron'] (*Inf.* VIII, 78), and its well-protected gates, mirrors almost exactly the defences of the cities which Dante would have known. Furthermore, the incident which follows, where Virgil and the pilgrim are refused access to the city has something of the atmosphere of a siege - another relatively common occurrence in the warring cities of medieval Italy.

In addition to these two explicit references to Hell as a city, Dante frequently describes the infernal landscape as mimicking civic structures, or draws upon urban imagery in order to describe this part of the afterlife. Probably the most notable instance of this occurs when the pilgrim and Virgil are about to pass into the ninth circle of Hell. Here, as when the city of Dis is first sighted, the pilgrim is led to believe that they are approaching a city by the sight of what he takes to be towers in the distance: 'me parve veder molte alte torri; / ond'io «Maestro di', che terra è questa?»' ['I soon / made out what seemed to be high, clustered towers. / "Master", I said, "what city lies ahead?"'] (*Inf.* XXXI, 20-21). In this case, however, Virgil explains to the Pilgrim that what he can see are not towers but giants; and yet the city image is not lost, but rather is taken up almost immediately by the poet, who compares the bodies of the giants protruding from the ice to the Tuscan town of Montere ggioni - 'come su la cerchia tonda / Montere ggion di torri si corona' ['just as Montere ggion is crowned with towers / soaring high above its curving ramparts'] (*Inf.* XXXI, 40-41). Similarly, the stone 'margin' or path which leads through the burning desert of the Sodomites is compared to the dykes built by the Flemings of the cities of Wissant and Bruges, and by the citizens of Padua in order to protect their cities from flooding,<sup>33</sup> and in the various punishments of the *malebolge* the poet also finds reminiscences of city life. The Pimps and Seducers are compared to pilgrims crossing the Ponte Sant'Angelo in Rome in the year of the Jubilee,<sup>34</sup> whilst in the *bolgia* of the Simoniacs the



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holes from which the legs of the sinners protrude remind the Pilgrim of those in which the priest would stand in the font of the Baptistry in Florence.<sup>35</sup> Likewise the *bolgia* of barratry is likened to ‘l’arzanà de’ Viniziani’ [‘the vast and busy shipyard of the Venetians’] (*Inf.* XXI, 7) where pitch is kept boiling all winter in order to mend unsound boats, just as in this part of Hell the pitch is constantly boiling, but here for the purposes of punishment. The reference to the Venetian arsenal here evokes the working life of a real city, and a similar image drawn from a typically urban occupation is also used to describe the *bolgia* of the Schismatics, where Mohammed is described in the language of the barrel-maker’s trade: ‘Già veggia, per mezzul perdere o lulla / com’io vidi un, così non si pertugia’ [‘No wine cask with its stave or cant-bar sprung / was ever split the way I saw someone’] (*Inf.* XXVIII, 22-23).

However, despite these repeated civic allusions, it is obvious that the landscape of Dante’s Hell is anything but civic. Within the Gate of Hell the pilgrim finds, not a ‘città dolente’ at all, but the river Acheron and the storms, mud and marshes of the circles of the incontinent, and this contrast is even more striking in the case of the city of Dis. After the long episode describing the difficulty of entering this city, Virgil and the pilgrim are confronted, within Dis’s walls, by a scene which is very different from that which might have been expected. Initially they find themselves not in a *polis* but a *necropolis* where the souls of the heretics are punished in burning tombs. Immediately, Dis breaks the normal rules of inside and outside, since, as has been seen, the statutes of medieval Italian cities dictated that cemeteries should be situated *outside* the walls. Moreover, this paradox becomes even more marked as the tombs of the heretics are left behind and the travellers come instead to a landslide:

In su l’estremità d’un alta ripa  
che facevan gran pietre rotte in cerchio  
venimmo sopra piú crudele stipa;

[We reached the curving brink of a steep bank  
constructed of enormous broken rocks;  
below us was a crueler den of pain.]  
(*Inf.* XI, 1-3)

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and in canto XII this landscape is described once again as a wild and natural one - 'Era lo loco [...] / [...] alpestro' ['Not only was that place, where we had come / to descend, craggy'] (*Inf.* XII, 1-2). From this point on Hell is presented as a natural environment with rivers, woods, cliffs, a desert and a frozen lake. Moreover, the way in which this environment is presented emphasises that it is the very antithesis of a civic environment; inhospitable, harsh and uncivilised. This is seen particularly clearly in the circles of violence, where the Pilgrim and Virgil cross first the Phlegethon, a river of boiling blood, then the wood of the suicides, which emblematically, is described totally in negative terms as:

[...] un bosco  
che da nessun sentiero era segnato.  
Non fronda verde, ma di color fosco;  
non rami schietti, ma nodosi e 'nvolti;  
non pomi v'eran ma stecchi con toscò:

[[...] a forest  
that was not marked by any path at all.  
No green leaves, but rather black in color,  
no smooth branches, but twisted and entangled,  
no fruit, but thorns of poison bloomed instead]  
(*Inf.* XIII, 2-6)

and finally a desert, onto which flames rain continually and through which runs a stream of boiling blood. Similarly the descent into the eighth circle on the back of Geryon, with its roaring waterfall and jagged cliff - 'la stagliata rocca' (*Inf.* XVII, 134) - continues the stress on the violence of nature, as do the descriptions, in *Malebolge*, of the bridge between *bolge* as a cliff or a crag, 'uno scoglio' (*Inf.* XVIII, 69), of climbing 'su per la scheggia' ['along the jagged ridge'] (*Inf.* XVIII, 71), or - again - of the 'scoglio sconcio ed erto / che sarebbe a le capre duro varco' ['the ridge, so steep and rugged, / would have been hard even for goats to cross'] (*Inf.* XIX, 131-132).

Hell, therefore, both is and is not a city, and its citizens - whilst being 'insiders' in the sense that they *are* citizens, punished within the gates and walls which mark Hell's boundaries - are also, as has

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been seen, exiles from the *civitas Dei*, eternal outsiders, with all the negative connotations which such a status implies. The souls punished within the city of Dis - Hell's insiders - are more often violently individualistic; intent on attacking their fellow citizens rather than co-existing with them in peace and harmony. As an illustration of this point, it is enough to think of Farinata's unconcern for his fellow Florentine and fellow heretic, Cavalcante, and his desire to perpetuate in Hell, in his discussion with the pilgrim, Florence's Guelph-Ghibelline conflict; or of Ugolino and Ruggieri - two Pisans, frozen together in the same hole in the ice of Cocytus, where the former gnaws relentlessly on the brains of the latter. Hell is a city which resembles a wilderness, and its citizens resemble the archetypal wilderness-dweller, the monster - seen as being more animal than human, and innately evil. Everything which, for Dante, goes to make up the ideal city - both in its physical structure (walls, gates, churches, centres of government and so on) and in the civilised conduct which it implies - are here inverted to make up his infernal city, and the monstrous citizens of Hell are punished in a typically savage environment in order to show how they rejected the civilised values of city life.

### Citizens and Outsiders

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that Dante's city of Dis contains within its walls representatives of many of the groups traditionally excluded from medieval urban societies. As has been seen, the first group of souls punished inside Dis are the heretics - one of the groups most commonly excluded from medieval cities. Their position directly inside the city-walls seems to define Dis straight away as a city of outsiders - a definition which is confirmed by the souls encountered on the remainder of the journey. Further heretical figures appear amongst the schismatics in Inferno XXVIII; and Dis also contains homosexuals,<sup>36</sup> prostitutes and their pimps,<sup>37</sup> as well as common criminals. In this last group the two highway-robbers - Rinier da Corneto and Rinier Pazzi - 'che fecero a le strade tanta guerra' ['whose battlefields were highways where they robbed'] (*Inf.* XII, 138) - are particularly significant, pointing to the dangers lurking outside the safe havens of the cities.<sup>38</sup> In addition, leprosy

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and insanity - two of the diseases with which the falsifiers are afflicted (in cantos XXIX and XXX) - were diseases which inspired particular fear in the Middle Ages and often led to expulsion from the community.<sup>39</sup> Finally, even the apparently civilised Ulysses can be seen as a wanderer, one who consciously rejects his community in order to go in search of a 'mondo sanza gente' ['world they call unpeopled'] (*Inf.* XXVI, 117).

Given the savagery of the setting in which the community of outsiders exists, it is no coincidence that Ugolino is described in *Inferno* XXXIII in bestial terms - 'riprese 'l teschio misero co' denti, / che furo a l'osso, come d'un can, forti' [attacked again the live skull with his teeth / sharp as a dog's, and as fit for grinding bones'] (*Inf.* XXXIII, 77-78). Both on earth - since the sin for which he is punished in Hell is precisely that of treachery against his city - and in Hell in his violent reaction to Ruggieri, Ugolino denies that part of himself which is most uniquely human - his civic, communal instinct. Bestial imagery is, as is well known, very common in Hell. The gluttonous are also compared to dogs - 'Urlar li fa la pioggia come cani' ['Under the rain they howl like dogs'] (*Inf.* VI, 19) - whilst the wrathful in the Marsh of Styx are described as being like 'porci in brago' ['pigs in mud'] (*Inf.* VIII, 50), and the barrators are compared to frogs, (*Inf.* XXII, 25-33), dolphins (*Inf.* XXII, 19-21), otters (*Inf.* XXII, 36) and ducks (*Inf.* XXII, 130). In fact, the *bolgia* of barratry is particularly characterised by animal imagery, with the devils -whose names also carry bestial overtones - being compared three times to dogs (*Inf.* XXI, 44-45; *Inf.* XXI, 67-69; *Inf.* XXIII, 17-18), twice to birds of prey (*Inf.* XXII, 131; *Inf.* XXII, 139), and once to cats playing with a mouse (*Inf.* XXII, 58). This sin - involving the misuse of civic institutions -is presented as being particularly bestial in its implications. Like Ugolino, Dante implies, the souls in this *bolgia* are no longer political animals, but animals pure and simple. This bringing together of the bestial and the civic also emerges in the case of Vanni Fucci, who actually describes himself as a beast and Pistoia as his lair - 'son Vanni Fucci / bestia, e Pistoia mi fu degna tana' (*Inf.* XXIV, 125-126).

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In addition to this animal imagery, however, it is perhaps even more significant that the souls in Hell are also seen as sharing the characteristics of the various monstrous races whose descriptions the Middle Ages had inherited from the classical tradition - races with only one huge foot on which they ran at superhuman speed, others with their heads sunken into their chests or with huge ears, races with the heads of dogs and other human-animal hybrids.<sup>40</sup> Like the citizens of Dis, such races are fundamentally linked with the uncivilised space where they were believed to exist, a space outside or beyond the known and the comprehensible.<sup>41</sup> Lucifer, with his shaggy body, inhuman size and three faces, is very clearly a monstrous figure and a fitting ruler ('Lo 'mperador del doloroso regno' ['The king of the vast kingdom of all grief'] - *Inf.* XXXIV, 28) of the 'savage' city of Hell. His position at the centre of the earth - the lowest point of Dante's Hell - recalls the fact that, on medieval maps, monstrous figures were frequently portrayed in positions which highlight their marginality with regard to 'human' and specifically Christian civilisation.<sup>42</sup> But it is not only the obviously 'monstrous' characters of Dante's Hell who are to be seen in this way. Dante's sodomites provide one of the most striking examples of the way in which Hell's citizens are presented as monstrous outsiders. The sodomites, who are naked (*Inf.* XIV, 19; *Inf.* XVI, 35) and whose skin is burnt and charred by the flames which continually rain down on them (*Inf.* XV, 26-27; *Inf.* XVI, 30), recall the Ethiopian - one of the most famous of the monstrous races.<sup>43</sup> The swiftness of the sodomites is also emphasised. Brunetto Latini in *Inferno* XV

[...] parve di coloro  
che corrono a Verona il drappo verde  
per la campagna; e parve di costoro  
quelli che vince, non colui che perde

[[...] seemed like one of those  
who run Verona's race across its fields  
to win the green cloth prize, and he was like  
the winner of the group, not the last one in.]  
(*Inf.* XV, 121-124)

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and the three Florentines in the following canto also move at great speed - 'a fuggirsi / ali sembiar le gambe loro isnelle' ['their nimble legs were more like wings in flight'] (*Inf.* XVI, 86-87). Both this and the way in which the heads and feet of this last group point in opposite directions ('n contraro il collo / faceva ai piè continuo viaggio' ['their necks and feet / moved constantly in opposite directions'] - *Inf.* XVI, 26-27) are characteristics of monstrous races. Perhaps even more significantly, deviant sexual practices are frequently attributed to monstrous peoples. According to White, they are '*incapable of assuming the responsibilities of a father*' (p.20) - a fact which obviously links them with the sodomites. On the political level too, their homosexuality equates the sodomites with monsters and outsiders. Dante's sodomites, like these groups, are guilty of a rejection of the fundamental truth that human beings are political animals, since their sin implies a rejection of the family, which - as is clear from *Convivio* IV, iv - is, for the poet, at the basis of political life, being the first and most basic form of human community. On one level this parallel between the sodomites and the monstrous races may seem surprising, since the pilgrim's sense of admiration for the Florentines of the previous generation whom he meets here emerges very clearly from these cantos.<sup>44</sup> However, these souls are citizens of Hell and thus by definition bad citizens. In fact Dante's presentation of them in monstrous terms only serves to emphasise the ironic contrast between their infernal condition and what they had once been. 'In life, Dante's homosexuals had been white sophisticated city-dwellers; in death, however, they have been transformed into black naked savages inhabiting a harsh primitive environment'.<sup>45</sup>

### The Garden

There is, however, one area of Hell which does not appear to fit into the pattern of opposition between city and wilderness, inside and outside which I have outlined. Limbo is neither a civic space nor a savage natural one,<sup>46</sup> but rather contains a 'nobile castello' ['splendid castle'] (*Inf.* IV, 106) surrounded by seven circles of walls and 'difeso intorno d'un bel fiumicello' ['defended by a sweetly flowing stream'] (*Inf.* IV, 108). Within these walls is a beautiful

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meadow - a 'prato di fresca verdura' (*Inf.* IV, 111) - where the 'spiriti magni' of the virtuous Pagans are grouped 'sopra 'l verde smalto' '[on the lustrous green]' (*Inf.* IV, 118-119). Whilst not a *locus amoenus* in any traditional sense of the word, since Limbo is - as the attitude of Virgil towards this place never allows the reader to forget - a place of punishment, the contrast between this circle, where light has still not been overcome by darkness and where no physical suffering occurs, and the rest of Hell is striking. This castle is obviously an 'inside' space in a positive sense; the seven walls which enclose it have been seen as representing the seven moral and intellectual virtues, the virtues of a pre-Christian age - prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance, intellect, science and knowledge - or the seven liberal arts - music, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, grammar, logic and rhetoric; and yet the area enclosed within these walls is clearly *not* a civic space. Rather, the castle of Limbo resembles a garden - a place of nature and yet not a totally natural place, precisely because it is enclosed, controlled and in some way civilised. It recalls the true *locus amoenus* of the Garden of Eden; and, indeed, it may be seen as an example of what W.A. McClung describes as a 'compromised Eden'.<sup>47</sup> McClung points to two opposing views of Paradise, one - which predates sin - is a garden without a building, the idyllic situation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the other - which acknowledges the existence of sin - is a building enclosing a garden, and in this case the building is necessary as a fortification against the menace of sin which, in keeping with what we have already seen - exists *outside*. The fortifications of the castle of Limbo set it apart from the rest of Hell, but they also constitute an admission of its limitations. The castle marks out the virtuous Pagans as 'insiders' and yet it also imprisons them in a permanent exile from God, in the same way that the 'città dolente' of Hell as a whole constitutes a prison for those within it - an exile which is summed up in Virgil's statement that 'sanza speme vivemo in disio' ['cut off from hope, we live on in desire'] (*Inf.* IV, 42).

The garden would thus seem to constitute a mediatory space between the city and the wilderness, a space which may be both inside and outside simultaneously. In a similar way to Limbo, the

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Valley of the Princes described in *Purgatorio* VII and VIII, also represents a 'compromised Eden'. Even more than Limbo - whose positive image largely derives from a contrast with the rest of Hell - the Valley of the Princes is depicted as an idyllic space:

Oro e argento fine, cocco e biacca,  
indico legno, lucido sereno,  
fresco smeraldo in l'ora che si fiacca;  
da l'erba e da li fior dentr'a quel seno  
posti, ciascun sarìa di color vinto,  
come dal suo maggiore è vinto il meno.  
Non avea pur natura ivi dipinto,  
ma di soavità di mille odori  
vi facea uno incognito e indistinto.

[Think of fine silver, gold, cochineal, white lead,  
Indian wood, glowing and deeply clear,  
fresh emerald the instant it is split -  
the brilliant colors of the grass and flowers  
within that dale would outshine all of these,  
as nature naturally surpasses art.  
But nature had not only painted there:  
the sweetness of a thousand odors fused  
in one unknown, unrecognizable.]  
(*Purg.* VII, 73-81)

Moreover, the souls within the Valley are presented clearly as constituting a 'community' -in contrast to the way in which they had lived on earth, when they had been more interested in increasing their own power, often through violent means. The sense of community which prevails here emerges not only from the feeling of peace which reigns within the Valley, but also from the fact that twice in these two cantos the negligent rulers pray together - in canto VII singing the hymn *Salve Regina* and in canto VIII the *Te lucis ante* - in a very significant turning of the whole community to God.

However, the Valley of the Princes - like Limbo - is a compromised or imperfect *locus amoenus*. The negligent rulers within the Valley, although they are ultimately destined for salvation, are outsiders in a very obvious sense. Their idyllic valley is situated in Ante-Purgatory - that is, *outside* the gate of Purgatory proper, to which, indeed, the



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pilgrim will be carried up directly from the valley. These souls have not yet begun to be cleansed of their sins by the sufferings of Purgatory, and for them the Valley is a place of punishment in the same way that the castle of Limbo is for the virtuous Pagans. The fact that these souls are prevented in Ante-Purgatory from beginning the process of purgation because of their late-repentance constitutes a form of retribution rather than a form of cleansing (in the same way that the punishments in Hell are purely retributive) - it does not serve the purpose of removing the stain of sin from the soul but merely punishes, and as such - in terms of its eternal function - is as close to Hell as it is to Purgatory. In addition, in the same way that Limbo's fortifications served both as a protection against sin and as an acknowledgement of the threat of sin, the Valley of the Princes is also a 'fortified' space - protected not by walls, but by the presence of two angels with flaming swords who stand guard on either side of the valley, 'sí che la gente in mezzo sí contenne' ['thus, all the souls were held between the two'] (*Purg.* VIII, 33), from the nightly threat of evil in the form of a serpent, described by Sordello as 'l nostro avversaro' ['our adversary'] (*Purg.* VIII, 95). These angels recall those placed at the entrance to Eden after the Fall to prevent the return of sinful humanity to the place of innocence, and, indeed, the serpent which appears in the Valley is described as 'forse qual diede ad Eva il cibo amaro' ['the very one, perhaps, / that offered Eve the bitter fruit to eat'] (*Purg.* VIII, 99). Like Limbo, the Valley of the Princes recalls Eden; but the Eden recalled by the Valley is explicitly the Eden in which sin is already present - a lost garden or one from which exile is already inevitable.

It is only at the end of his journey through Purgatory, the seven P's having been removed from his forehead, that Dante's pilgrim is allowed to enter the true Christian *locus amoenus*, the perfect garden, an Eden without the taint of sin:

Un'aura dolce, senza mutamento  
avere in sé, mi ferá per la fronte  
non di piú colpo che soave vento;  
per cui le fronde, tremolando, pronte

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tutte quante piegavano a la parte  
u' l prim'ombra gitta il santo monte;  
non però dal loro esser dritto sparte  
tanto, che li augelletti per le cime  
lasciasser d'operare ogne lor arte;  
ma con piena letizia l'ore prime,  
cantando, ricevfeno intra le foglie,  
che tenevan bordone a le sue rime,

[My forehead felt the stirring of sweet air,  
whose flowing rhythm always stayed the same,  
and struck no harder than the gentlest breeze;  
and, in the constant, moving air, each branch  
with trembling leaves was bending to one side  
toward where the holy mount first casts its shade;  
they did not curve so sharply toward the ground  
that little birds among the topmost leaves  
could not continue practising their art:  
they welcomed in full-throated joyful sound  
the day's beginning to their leafy boughs  
whose sighing sound accompanied their song]  
(*Purg.* XXVIII, 7-18)

This garden looks back not only to Limbo and the Valley of the Princes, gardens whose imperfections are now clearly shown up, but also to the Dark Wood of *Inferno* I, which is explicitly recalled when the poet states that he had soon wandered, 'dentro a la selva antica tanto, ch'io / non potea rivedere ond'io mi 'ntrassi' ['so deep within the ancient wood / I could not see the place where I came in'] (*Purg.* XXVIII, 23-24).<sup>48</sup> This garden is the complete antithesis of the Dark Wood - the place of salvation which opposes the place of sin - and yet it is, I feel, significant that the Earthly Paradise is not - or not in itself - the 'inside' space from which the Dark Wood represents an exile. This is made clear by Beatrice in canto XXXII, when she tells the pilgrim that:

Qui sarai tu poco tempo silvano;  
e sarai meco senza fine cive  
di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano.

[A short time you shall dwell outside the walls;  
then you, with me, shall live eternally,

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citizen of that Rome where Christ is a Roman.]  
(*Purg.* XXXII, 100-102)

The Earthly Paradise, like the Valley of the Princes, is a transitional place, a place which leads to Heaven (just as the Dark Wood leads to Hell), but not Heaven itself. In contrast to the intermediary space of the garden, Beatrice refers to the true Heaven as a city - 'quella Roma onde Cristo è romano' - the city where perfect civilisation is attained and the good of the individual wholly identified with the good of the community, the city which therefore diametrically opposes the savage, wilderness-city of Hell. It is no coincidence that, when Beatrice finally reveals the Rose of the Blessed in the Empyrean to the pilgrim, she does so once again in civic terms: 'Vedi nostra città quant'ella gira' ['Look at our city, see its vast expanse'] (*Par.* XXX, 130). Only in Paradise, as has been seen, is the condition of exile negated and only in Paradise is the soul truly an 'insider'.

## NOTES

\* All references to Dante's works are taken from the following editions: *La Divina Commedia*, edited by N.Sapegno, 3 vols, 3rd edition, (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1985); *Opere Minori*, 2 vols, (Milan-Naples: Ricciardi, 1979-1984). Translations from the *Commedia* are by Mark Musa (*Dante: The Divine Comedy*, 3 vols, Penguin Classics); translations from the *Convivio* by Richard Lansing (*Dante's Il Convivio (The Banquet)*, New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1990).

<sup>1</sup> A.P.d'Entrèves, *Dante as a Political Thinker*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p.11.

<sup>2</sup> The following works provide a general introduction in English to the position of the city within Dante's political thought:

- A.P.d'Entrèves, *Dante as a Political Thinker*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952).
- S.Farnell, *The Political Ideas of the Divine Comedy: an*

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*Introduction*, (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1985).

- J.M.Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

- J.M.Najemy, 'Dante and Florence', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, edited by R.Jacoff, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.80-99.

- E.Peters, 'Pars, Parte: Dante and an Urban Contribution to Political Thought', in *The Medieval City*, edited by H.A.Miskimin, D.Herlihy & A.L.Udovitch, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1977), pp.113-140.

<sup>3</sup>. '[...] sì come Aristotile dice, l'uomo è animale civile [...]' ['For as Aristotle says, man is a social animal'] (*Conv.* IV, xxvii, 3).  
'[...] la umana civiltade [...] a uno fine è ordinata, cioè a vita felice; a la quale nullo per sé è sufficiente a venire senza l'aiutorio d'alcuno [...]. E però dice lo Filosofo che l'uomo naturalmente è compagnevole animale' ['Man's need for human society [...] is established for a single end: namely a life of happiness, which no one is able to attain by himself without the aid of someone else [...]. Therefore the Philosopher says that man is by nature a social animal'] (*Conv.* IV, iv, 1).

<sup>4</sup>. 'E sì come un uomo a sua sufficienza richiede compagnia dimestica di famiglia, così una casa a sua sufficienza richiede una vicinanza [...]. E però che una vicinanza a sé non può in tutto soddisfare, conviene a satisfacimento di quella essere la cittade' ['And just as for his well-being an individual requires the domestic companionship provided by a family, so for its well-being a household requires a community [...]. And since a community could not provide for its own well-being completely by itself, it is necessary for this well-being that there be a city'] (*Conv.* IV, iv, 2).

<sup>5</sup>. 'Like the sailor, the citizen is a member of a community. Now, sailors have different functions, for one of them is a rower, another a pilot, and a third a look-out man, a fourth is described by some other similar term; and while the precise definition of each individual's excellence applies exclusively to him, there is, at the same time, a common definition applicable to them all. For they have all of them a common object, which is safety in navigation. Similarly one citizen differs from another, but the salvation of the community is the common business of them all' (Aristotle, *The Politics* III, 4; edited by S.Everson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988)).

<sup>6</sup>. This rejection of factionalism will mark the end of Dante's active

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involvement in politics, and the beginning of his acceptance of the greater mission here assigned to him by his ancestor - that of doing God's work through the writing of his poem (*Par.* XVII, 124-142). This mission requires him to stand above the narrow issues of party politics; in a sense, it *demands* that he be an outsider. Giuseppe Mazzotta, for example, comments that 'Dante's exile from the city is linked with the poetic act [...]. It is an act central to the idea of community, because through poetic discourse Dante acts on the world by being outside of it' (G.Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), p.138). Nonetheless, his becoming a 'party of one' is also 'of a piece with the salty taste of other men's bread, the steepness of other men's stairs, and the bestiality of the exiled White Guefts. [...] In that perverted world, Dante's own future could be at best dismal, and the badge of "parte per te stesso" was not a badge otherwise worn in honor' (Peters, p.116). As will be seen, one of the lessons of the *Commedia* is that the Christian must, on occasion, suffer the pain of being an outsider in life in order to become an insider in the hereafter.

<sup>7</sup> G.Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by M.Jolas, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp.211-212.

<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this opposition may be seen as a fundamental human trait, rooted in the distinction between the 'self' and the 'other'. Rarely, however, is the situation of the individual in space felt merely as a geographical notion. Rather, geographical systems come to overlap with systems of values which privilege the self, the near, the familiar, and 'people everywhere tend to structure space - geographical and cosmological - with themselves at the center and with concentric zones (more or less well-defined) of decreasing value beyond' (Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1974), p.27).

<sup>9</sup> The notion of exile as punishment depends, precisely, on 'landscape being perceived in terms of "inside" and "outside" or "home" and "alien" spaces' (R.Starn, *Contrary Commonwealth: the Theme of Exile in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1982), p.6). It involves a 'translation from the centre to the periphery, from organized space invested with meaning to a boundary where conditions of experience are problematic' (R.Edwards, 'Exile, Self and Society', in *Exile in Literature*, edited by M.I.Lagos-Pope, (London & Toronto: Bucknell University Press; Lewisburg: Associated University Presses, 1988), pp.15-31, (p.16)).

<sup>10</sup> H.Mayer, *Outsiders: A Study in Life and Letters*, translated by

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D.M.Sweet, (Cambridge Mass. & London: MIT Press, 1982), p.9.

<sup>11</sup> R.I.Moore, *The Birth of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p.100.

<sup>12</sup> P.Zumthor, *La Mesure du Monde: Représentation de l'Espace au Moyen Age*, (Paris: Seuil, 1993), p.156.

<sup>13</sup> See *Politics* I, 2.

<sup>14</sup> B.Geremek, 'The Marginal Man', in *The Medieval World*, edited by J.Le Goff, translated by L.G.Cochrane, (London: Collins & Brown, 1990), pp.347-373, (p.352).

<sup>15</sup> The Italian countryside of the Middle Ages is described by Vito Fumagalli as follows: 'Northern Italy was covered by forest and marsh which drastically impeded the development of agriculture. [...] To the south of the Po plain, in the northern Appenines, great forests of oak, beech and firs had sprung up and stretched virtually unbroken, although the foothills, like similar areas of low hills all over Europe were partially cultivated. The 'Bassa', the low-lying area between the Via Emilia and the Po, was characterized by dense forest and interminable marsh, particularly as one approached the river. The banks of the rivers were ill-defined, further encouraging the already frequent floods. Huge areas which had been cultivated in Roman times had reverted almost to their original state. To the north, in Lombardy and the Veneto, the Po valley was even more marshy' (V.Fumagalli, *Landscapes of Fear: Perceptions of Nature and the City in the Middle Ages*, translated by S.Mitchell, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p.99).

<sup>16</sup> 'The city sought to civilize the way of life of its citizens and to moderate the coarser aspects, seeking to end the conspicuous public displays of emotion which were normal. [...] The city was to be seemly: laws decreed that derelict buildings were not to mar its appearance and that houses and other buildings inside and outside the walls might not be demolished in order to sell the wood and stone for building material (a contrast with earlier centuries when much of the area inside town walls had been occupied by the ruins of Roman and later buildings)' (Fumagalli, p.92).

<sup>17</sup> In medieval poems celebrating individual cities (*laudes civitatum*), for example, the walls are seen as indicative of the overall greatness of the city, and are almost universally given primary importance and

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described in minute detail, with their gates and other associated features, a technique which 'gives an impression of the world as it must have appeared to many of the citizens of the communes, with their own city in the centre and the outside world viewed as it were through the appropriate gate of the city'. (J.K.Hyde, 'Medieval Descriptions of Cities', in *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 48 (1966), 308-341, (p.331)).

<sup>18</sup> D.Waley, *The Italian City-Republics*, 3rd edition, (London & New York: Longman, 1988), p.102.

<sup>19</sup> G.Chittolini, 'Civic Religion and the Countryside in Late Medieval Italy', in *City and Countryside in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, edited by T.Dean and C.Wickham, (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1990), pp.69-80, (p.71).

<sup>20</sup> Chittolini highlights the elements of such rituals which stress the city's authority over its *contado*, such as 'a concern that peasants take part; the coercive nature that this participation eventually took; the coercive nature too of the offerings (which made them more like homage); the reassertion of the city's sovereignty over the *contado* and, consequently, of the subjection of rural communities to the city' (p.74). See also Waley, p.102.

<sup>21</sup> C.Frugoni, *A Distant City: Images of Urban Experience in the Medieval World*, translated by W.McCuaig (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.10.

<sup>22</sup> Illumination from the Gospels of Liuthard, c.990 (Aachen cathedral, unnumbered MS, fol.46<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>23</sup> Giovanni da Milano, *Prayer in the Garden* (Prato, Pinacoteca comunale).  
'This place, linked to one of the principle events in mankind's history, cannot be the open countryside, which is exorcized by that architectonic insert, the sign of the work of man' (Frugoni, p.11).

<sup>24</sup> Despite the conventional nature of much of the allegory in this first canto, the stress on historical reality which enters the poem with Virgil's appearance in the wood, and which reveals that not only Virgil but also the lost pilgrim have an independent existence within this 'real world', points out to the reader that the wood, the beasts and the hill bathed in sunlight are, themselves, 'real' - that is, they are not merely poetic and allegorical inventions. The emotions which the wood evokes

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as a literal physical space are thus as significant as those aroused by its allegorical meaning as a place of sin. See Z.G. Bara ski, 'La lezione esegetica di *Inferno* I: allegoria, storia e letteratura nella *Commedia*', in *Dante e le forme dell'allegoresi*, edited by M. Picone, (Ravenna: Longo, 1987), pp. 79-97.

<sup>25</sup> Bachelard, p. 185.

<sup>26</sup> This exile, or realisation of being an outsider is defined by John Took as a state of 'self-loss'. 'Straight away, and in lines often regarded as belonging to a preliminary and crude stage of Dantean allegorism in the poem, we are confronted by the prospect of loss, by the symptoms of man in his estrangement'. The movement of the poem is therefore seen as a movement towards the recovery of that which is lost, or the rectifying of this estrangement (J. Took, 'Dante, Augustine and the Drama of Salvation', in *Word and Drama in Dante*, edited by J. C. Barnes and J. Petrie, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1993), pp. 73-92, (p. 81)).

<sup>27</sup> In the Bible too, therefore, an uncivilised *place* is linked with uncivilised, or immoral, behaviour. For example, the Hebrew word for 'wilderness' (*sh'mâmâh*) is used to refer both to a moral condition of desolation and to a desolate, barren place, so that 'it appears quite difficult to distinguish between a moral condition [...], a place and a thing in all those instances in the Bible where words that might be translated as wild or wilderness appear' (H. White, 'The Forms of Wilderness: Archaeology of an Idea', in *The Wild Man Within: An Image in Western Thought from Renaissance to Romanticism*, edited by E. Dudley and M. Novak, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), pp. 3-38, (p. 13)).

<sup>28</sup> '[...] generis humani [...] in duo genera distribuimus, unum eorum, qui secundum hominem, alterum eorum, qui secundum Deum uiuunt; quas etiam systice appellamus ciuitates duas, hoc est duas societates hominum, quarum est una quae praedestinata est in aeternum regnare cum Deo, altera aeternum supplicium subire cum diabolo.' ['I classify the human race into two branches: the one consists of those who live by human standards, the other of those who live according to God's will. I also call these two classes the two cities speaking allegorically. By two cities I mean two societies of human beings, one of which is predestined to reign with God for all eternity, the other doomed to undergo eternal punishment with the Devil'] (*De ciuitate Dei*, XV, 1). (S. Aurelii Augustini Episcopi Hipponensis, *De ciuitate Dei contra paganos*, edited with an introduction and appendices by J. E. C. Welldon,



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2 vols, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York & Toronto: Macmillan, 1924); St Augustine, *City of God*, translated by H. Bettenson, (Penguin Classics, 1984).)

<sup>29</sup> For Giuseppe Mazzotta 'Dante's text in *Paradiso* XXV deliberately wavers between the vision of order in the empirical, concrete city of Florence and the "attender certo" of the glory of Jerusalem', since hope, the theme of this canto, 'is the promise of the final times, but it also tells us that the past can never be regarded as a closed and dead archaeology and the past itself has seeds for the future'. The two, apparently opposed, repatriations thus come to be seen as complementary (*Dante, Poet of the Desert*, pp.145-146).

<sup>30</sup> G. Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p.186.

<sup>31</sup> On the positive implications of exile and the status of outsider in a Christian sense, see G. Ladner, 'Homo viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order', in *Speculum*, XLII (1967), 233-259.

<sup>32</sup> In contrast to Dante's infernal inscription are, for example, the laudatory poem beginning: 'Dic homo qui transis, qui portae limina tangis / Roma secunda vale, regni decus imperiale', quoted by Bonvesin della Riva in his description of thirteenth-century Milan as being inscribed on one of the city's gates, and that, in much the same vein, found at Pavia, which read: 'Roma secunda, vale mundi caput imperiale. / Tu bello Thebas, tu sensu vincis Athenas'. See G. Fasoli, 'La coscienza civica nelle "laudes civitatum"', in *La coscienza cittadina nei comuni italiani del duecento*, (Todi: Convegno del centro di studi sulla spiritualità medievale, 1972), pp.11-44; Hyde, 'Medieval Descriptions of Cities'.

<sup>33</sup> Qual i Fiamminghi tra Guizzante e Bruggia,  
temendo 'l flotto che 'nver lor s'avventa,  
fanno lo schermo perché 'l mar si fuggia;  
e qual i Padoan lungo la Brenta,  
per difender lor ville e lor castelli,  
anzi che Carentana il caldo senta;  
a tale imagine eran fatti quelli,

[As the Flemings, living with the constant threat  
of flood tides rushing in between Wissant  
and Bruges, build their dikes to force the sea back;  
as the Paduans build theirs on the shores of the Brenta

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to protect their towns and homes before warm weather  
turns Chiarentana's snow to rushing water  
so were these walls we walked upon constructed]  
(*Inf.* XV, 4-10)

34. come i Roman per l'essercito molto,  
l'anno del giubileo, su per lo ponte  
hanno a passar la gente modo colto,  
che da l'un lato tutti hanno la fronte  
verso 'l castello e vanno a Santo Pietro;  
da l'altra sponda vanno verso 'l monte.

[The Romans, too, in the year of the Jubilee  
took measures to accomodate the throngs  
that had to come and go across their bridge:  
they fixed it so on one side all were looking  
at the castle, and were walking to St. Peter's;  
on the other, they were moving toward the mount.]  
(*Inf.* XVIII, 28-33)

35. Non mi parcan men ampi né maggiori  
che que' che son nel mio bel San Giovanni,  
fatti per loco de' battezzatori;

[To me they seemed no wider and no deeper  
than those inside my lovely San Giovanni,  
in which the priest would stand or baptize from;]  
(*Inf.* XIX, 16-18)

36. Moore notes that male homosexuals, generally tolerated until the 12th century, are - after this date - 'assimilated to the stereotype of the common enemy' (p.94); whilst Mayer asserts that throughout history 'homosexuals appear without exception as criminals and villains' (p.146). Interestingly, even for those critics who deny that Dante's 'sodomites' are homosexuals, this group of sinners continues to be seen as a group of outsiders. Peter Armour, for example, suggests that Brunetto and his group of souls are Paterine heretics, whilst, for André Pézard, Brunetto's sin is fundamentally a linguistic one, revealed through his decision to write his *Tresor* in French rather than Italian. In this latter case Brunetto is to be seen as an outsider in the sense of one who rejects his native city, the place where he naturally belongs. (See P.Armour, 'Dante's Brunetto: the Paternal Paterine?', in *Italian Studies* XXXVIII, (1983), 1-38; A.Pézard, *Dante sous la pluie de feu: Enfer, chant XV*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J.Vrin, 1950).)

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<sup>37</sup>. The first two *bolge* of the eighth circle of Hell, both described in canto XVIII, seem to go together in this respect - the first containing the pimps and seducers, and the second the flatterers, amongst them the prostitute Thaïs ('Taide [...] la puttana' - *Inf.* XVIII, 133). Prostitutes constitute one of the most common groups which the medieval city attempted to distance from itself, although - unlike many other groups - their relationship to the city was an equivocal one, since they were often seen as a necessary - if undesirable - presence, and tolerated although not condoned. This means that sometimes, rather than be completely excluded from the city, they might instead be confined to a particular street or quarter. (See B.Anderson & J.P.Zinsser, *A History of Their Own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, 2 vols, (London: Penguin, 1988), I, pp.362-366.)

<sup>38</sup>. Fumagalli comments that forests and wildernesses were 'lonely places entered only by the occasional undaunted hermit, brigand or bandit, or intrepid hunter. Most people kept well away, partly from the fear of falling victim to these outlaws' (p.15).

<sup>39</sup>. 'In a world where sickness and infirmity were considered to be exterior signs of sin, those who were afflicted with them were cursed by God and thus by man too' (J.Le Goff, *Medieval Civilisation, 400-1500*, translated by J.Barrow, (Oxford & New York: Blackwell, 1989), p.321). The leper, however, is a special case. Lepers were assimilated in the medieval imagination with the other minority groups and largely seen as sharing their characteristics. 'The church and public institutions acted together to effect a total separation of lepers from the rest of society. [...]. They had to remain outside inhabited areas [...] they could not touch anything touched by healthy people, and they had to announce their presence by sounding a rattle [...]. Public opinion observed them fearfully, perhaps also with hatred. They were thought to practice unrestrained sexuality [...], and were suspected of hatching villainous schemes against the society of the healthy (Geremek, p.367). Above all, like his or her fellow outsiders, the leper constitutes a threat to society and, as such, the presence of the disease in the city of Dis is comprehensible.

<sup>40</sup>. See R.Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment and Demonology*, (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952); J.Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*, (Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1981); White, 'The Forms of Wildness'.

<sup>41</sup>. 'Most accounts of the races [...] place [...] stress on the uncivilized

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nature of their habitat. Monstrous men [...] cannot truly be understood apart from their barren and savage landscapes' (Friedman, p.30).

<sup>42</sup> 'In those maps which give a theological turn to geography, monstrous men are symbolically the farthest from Christ of anything in the creation, and are represented in a narrow band at the edge of the world, as far as possible from Jerusalem, the center of Christianity. In those maps that rely on scientific thinking about climate and environment, the races are shown in the Antipodes at the extreme south of the world, and their physical appearance and moral character are explained by the influences of the extremes of temperature to be found there' (Friedman, pp.37-38). In *Inferno* XXXIV too, Lucifer's position is denoted by its diametrical opposition to Jerusalem. For the implications of Lucifer's position, see also J.Freccero, 'The Sign of Satan', in *Modern Language Notes*, 80, (1965), 11-26; J.Friedman, 'Medieval Cartography and *Inferno* XXXIV: Lucifer's Three Faces Reconsidered', in *Traditio*, 39, (1983), 447-456; and my discussion of 'Dante's Hell and the Medieval Idea of Jerusalem', in *The Italianist*, 11, (1991), 7-28.

<sup>43</sup> Friedman notes that '[p]opular etymology derived their name from the Greek words *aith* ("burn, blaze") and *ops* ("face"), suggesting that their color resulted from their close proximity to the sun' (*The Monstrous Races*, p.15).

<sup>44</sup> It is enough to think of the 'cara e buona immagine paterna' ['kind image, loving and paternal'] (*Inf.* XV, 83) of Brunetto, and of the pilgrim's positive reference to some of the souls whom he meets in canto XVI in his encounter with Ciaccio: 'Farinata e 'l Tegghiaio, che fuor sí degni, / Iacopo Rusticucci [...] / e li altri ch'a ben far puoser li 'ngegni' ['Farinata and Tegghiaio, who were so worthy, / Iacopo Rusticucci [...] and all the rest so bent on doing good'] (*Inf.* VI, 79-81).

<sup>45</sup> Z.G.Baranski, 'The "Marvellous" and the "Comic": Toward a Reading of *Inferno* XVI', in *Lectura Dantis*, 7 (1991), 72-95, (p.84).

<sup>46</sup> A.Bartlett Giamatti maintains that Limbo 'is the first of so many walled and buttressed edifices, the first of so many symbols, whether dedicated to good or evil, of the City'. Although it could be argued that Limbo - like Hell itself, and like Dis - gives the impression *from outside* of a city, which is then disappointed on passing inside its walls, Limbo is never described as such by Dante himself, and indeed the description of this structure as a 'nobile castello' ['splendid castle']

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suggests an entirely different kind of society (A.B.Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.95).

<sup>47</sup>. W.A.McClung, *The Architecture of Paradise: Survivals of Eden and Jerusalem*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 1983), p.7.

<sup>48</sup>. Compare the Dark Wood of *Inferno* I:

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura  
che la diritta via era smarrita [...]   
Io non so ben ridir com'ì' v'entrai  
tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto  
che la verace via abbandonai.

[Midway along the journey of our life  
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,  
for I had wandered off from the straight path [...]  
How I entered there I cannot truly say,  
I had become so sleepy at the moment  
when first I strayed, leaving the path of truth;]  
(*Inf.* I, 1-3; 10-12)